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Sir Philip Green battles to save his reputation in the court of public opinion

In his attempt to suppress the allegations, the former BHS boss may have damaged his reputation further

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The Cambridge Dictionary defines reputation as the "opinion that people in general have about someone, or how much respect or admiration someone receives, based on past behaviour or character". In this respect Sir Philip Green and his advisers were always going to have a PR war on their hands once he was outed as the prominent businessman behind the injunction against The Telegraph.

The last time Green made headlines was when BHS collapsed shortly after he sold it to a serial bankrupt with the loss of 11,000 jobs and a huge hole in the failed retailer's pension pot. Green quickly went from being known as the "king of the high street" to being branded "the unacceptable face of capitalism".

The fact that Green's reputation had already taken a recent battering may have been part of the motivation for his injunction against The Telegraph to stop it from publishing allegations of sexual and racial abuse by him against former staff.

From a PR perspective however, Mr Green's trying suppress this story via an injunction has further damaged his reputation. It simply adds fuel to the bonfire of articles about a very rich man being able to deploy considerable resources to try to gag the press, after he had already used large sums of money to silence former members of staff through non-disclosure agreements (NDAs).

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Sir Philip Green with, from left, Suki Waterhouse, Kate Moss, Cara Delevingne, Sienna Miller and Naomi Campbell

I would have advised Mr Green to have let The Telegraph publish its story — with his right of reply contained in the article and with all the usual pre-publication checks and balances in place. This would have allowed him to respond to the newspaper's investigation on the front foot, and engage in further media interest accordingly through a joined-up PR and legal strategy.

Of course, hindsight is a wonderful thing and the allegations against Mr Green may have been so damaging that his advisers felt an injunction was the only viable strategy in trying to protect his reputation. The fact that it was a politician — and not a newspaper, blogger or tweeter — that named Mr Green also surprised us all.

I concede that a "publish, be damned and then manage it through PR" strategy would have caused further damage to Mr Green's reputation if he left The Telegraph free to publish, but at least we, the public, and if necessary, the relevant authorities, could have decided how bad the charges against him were. The trouble he faces as a result of the injunction against The Telegraph is that an information vacuum has been created around the central allegations and it is being filled with all kinds of character assassinations against him.

Whatever we think about Sir Philip Green, it's important to stress that the allegations he faces are simply allegations at this stage and that he has a right to a fair hearing. The recent case of Cliff Richard and the BBC reminds us that trial by media is a dangerous thing. And if this turns into a criminal matter, we have to be very careful about how past media reporting could impact a jury.

As a result of Lord Hain's naming him in the "public interest", Mr Green is now fighting a battle for his reputation in the court of public opinion. And this is where how he engages with the public will be critical for his future rehabilitation, as a human being who makes mistakes, and as a businessman. Just as parliamentary privilege has trumped the legal process in this saga, PR now trumps the law in deciding Mr Green's fate — at least until a court decides otherwise.

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